

Twenty five years after the first episode of *Star Trek* was first transmitted, the ageing crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise are still boldly going where no Zimmer frames have been before. This month sees *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* beaming down to our video stores. Will it be the last voyage for Kirk and his crew? Allan Bryce investigates...

KEEP ON TREKKI

Captain Slog: Stardate - Xmas 1992. Clive James once wrote, "The last episode of *Star Trek* was made some years ago, but the series obeys Einstein's laws of space and time, forever circumnavigating the universe on its way back to your living room. Fans of the show often suffer from a shimmering before the eyes, indicating one of two things is happening. Either the viewer's brain is packing up completely or else the previous week's episode has caught

up with the episode he thought he was watching..."

Clive was being a bit unfair on the show, and on the folk who watch it, but there's also a lot of truth in what he says. For a start it does seem as if *Star Trek* has always been with us in one form or another. The original series was cancelled in 1969 after 79 episodes, but since then we've been treated to a cartoon show, six blockbuster feature films, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*,

and more Trekkie merchandise than you could shake Mr Spock's pointy ears at.

The five year voyage of the USS Enterprise has stretched on for a quarter of a century, during which time many notables have stood up to be counted as fully paid-up fans. Famed scientist and sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov was one, and the governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller said it was the only TV show he ever watched. Even former president Gerald Ford revealed he was a convert when he named the 1976 space shuttle The Enterprise.

Over the years the series has suffered a sea (space?) change into something rich and strange. Back in the 60s it all looked so glossy and hi-tech to kids who only had the cheap cardboard sets of *Doctor Who* to compare it to. But dipping into the the latest batch of re-runs with the cynicism of approaching middle age reveals that every planet had the same painted sky and plastic rocks, and the bridge of the Enterprise was nothing more than the interior of a Wimpy bar!

But that matters very little, really. Because classic *Trek* is engraved in the video firmament, forever young in features, trim in waistline, and cheesy in effects. A lot of interesting things happened on that plywood and plastic deck. But we're not here to talk about them. Instead let's move on to examine the movie series that began ten years





after the TV show went where many had gone before - into syndication.

The first *Star Trek* movie was originally to have been made for telly, bowing to public demand to revive the cult series. But along came *Star Wars* and smashed all boxoffice records, so Paramount decided to go for the movie audience instead, launching the portentously-titled *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* with a great deal of fanfare.

This mega-budget (\$40 million) production cost more to make than the entire 79 episodes of *Star Trek* that had preceded it. But the result was a distinct disappointment. The film had spectacular special effects, but they were largely wasted on a trivial storyline which would have been corny even in the original show.

The plot has William Shatner's Captain James T. Kirk now promoted to admiral and called upon to take command of his old ship in order to halt a strange alien craft that is gobbling up everything in its path as it heads on a collision course with Earth. To undertake this mission he calls upon his old buddies Spock (Leonard Nimoy) and 'Bones' (DeForest Kelly), plus new crew members Willard Decker (Stephen Collins) and bald-headed Vulcan princess Ilia (Persis Khambatta).

There were many good things about the movie: the superb effects, Jerry Goldsmith's majestic score (the main theme of which was later employed in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), and the enjoyment of seeing all the old faces again. But the script wasn't up to scratch and at almost two and a half hours in length, the film seemed to drag on forever - causing some pundits to dub it *Star Trek The Slow Motion Picture*!

Fortunately there were enough devoted Trekkies about to ensure that it made a profit at the boxoffice though, and so it was that the old faithfuls were called back yet again to face *The Wrath Of Khan* in *Star Trek II*. The sequel was shot by a television crew for a quarter of the cost of the first movie, and ironically turned out to be a great deal more enjoyable, capturing much of the vitality and ingenuity that had made the series so popular in the first place.

For inspiration the scripters of this one went back to an old *Trek* show called *Space Seed*, in which Kirk abandoned tyrannical superman Khan (Ricardo Montalban) on a remote planet to stew for a couple of centuries or so. Montalban was back in this big screen follow-up, chewing whatever scenery he could find in space as he set out to destroy his old enemy James T. Kirk.

Khan's trump card is in gaining

control of 'The Genesis Effect,' a device that can reintroduce living organisms in decaying areas (setting up a very impressive bit of computer-animated effects where it turns a dead planet into a foliage-covered paradise in a matter of seconds!). It all ends with a big space battle (one thing the first movie was sorely lacking), and Mr Spock's much-publicised death scene, where Nimoy bravely meets his fate doing the only logical thing he can do to save the Enterprise from a radioactive burnout: by wrestling with what looked like a giant ash tray - leaving a bereaved Shatner choked with emotion, quoting Dickens' immortal lines on his behalf: "It is a far, far better thing I do..."

Trekkies everywhere sobbed themselves to sleep at night, while Paramount executives rubbed their hands together and counted the boxoffice receipts. It was obvious that another sequel was in order. But how could they resurrect Mr Spock? It was a similar situation to the one faced by writer Paul Dehn when, after completing *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes* by having the whole universe blown to smithereens, he received a tersely-worded telegram from Fox executives saying, "Apes exist. Sequel required."

Sure enough, *Star Trek III - The Search For Spock* had Kirk and his trusty

crew commandeering the Enterprise to boldly go looking for their departed Vulcan buddy, who was last seen floating down toward the surface of the green and verdant planet Genesis - a place where rejuvenation is apparently a second-string miracle in the scheme of things. Arriving there they discover that Spock's coffin is nowhere to be seen. Where on Earth - I mean Genesis - can he be? It was difficult for audiences not to give the game away by shouting, "Over there, behind the camera," because Nimoy took director's credit - and made a good job of it, too.

In fact Paramount were so impressed by Nimoy's work that they allowed him to stay at the helm of *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, easily the most enjoyable of all the big screen *Star Trek* adventures. This imaginative entry allowed our intergalactic heroes to venture back in time to present-day San Francisco, where they exchange their fancy dress space gear for more appropriate modern fashions and go in search of the whales who can save the future world from extinction.

There were some delightful twists in this novel tale, scripted by Nicholas (*Time After Time*) Meyer, and fans of the series were particularly pleased that Meyer's screenplay allowed generous amounts of screen time to popular supporting characters like James Doohan's Scotty and Walter Koenig's Chekov. The increased comedy quota helped the film attract non-Trekkie viewers as well, and it turned out to be the biggest moneymaker of the big screen series to date, encouraging Paramount to forge ahead almost immediately with *Star Trek V*.

This time round, though, the results were not that impressive. Subtitled *The Final Frontier*, the fifth *Star Trek* movie was a \$32 million



production that looked like an expanded TV episode, with less-than-exciting action scenes and cartoon-like special effects. For some mystifying reason this drew the series back to its boring *Star Trek The Motion Picture* origins, with a dreary tale about the Enterprise crew searching for God on the legendary planet Shakaree. Anyone who has viewed the TV episodes, *The Alternative Factor*, *This Side Of Paradise* or *Return Of The Archons* will have seen this done better.

The main problem here seems to have been William Shatner, who followed his old mate Leonard Nimoy into the director's chair, but didn't have the talent to do as imaginative a job. The script (partly based on an idea by Shatner) is routine and lacking in incident, and though the familiar, reassuring banter between the crew and its captain remains, the truth is that most of the cast has gotten formidably, uncomfortably old.

This wouldn't matter so much, were the script to have allowed them to act their age. But check out the opening scene where we see Kirk scaling the perilous peaks of Yosemite with a skill that pretenders to Mount



Gorkon is assassinated before the alliance can take place, and blame for his murder falls upon Kirk, who is still grieving for his son (killed by Klingons in *Part III*). One of the most exciting *Star Trek* features to date, the home video version of this contains an additional two minutes of footage not seen in the cinema version.

With the recent death of *Star Trek*'s creator and leading light, Gene Roddenberry, the question now remains, is *Star Trek VI* the final voyage of Kirk and his increasingly geriatric crew? The answer isn't clear, but according to Hollywood rumour William Shatner has commissioned a script for *Star Trek VII*, which would be about a rift between the Spock and Kirk friendship. The down side of this is that Shatner wants to direct the movie as well!

Paramount are thinking about it, although they are investigating the possibilities of bringing *The Next Generation* to the big screen as well. Only time will tell. In the meantime we still have six movies, 79 TV shows, and a whole lot more *Star Trek* paraphernalia endlessly circling the universe on its way back to our living rooms. So in one way or another, the crew of the USS Enterprise will be boldly going places for many a light year to come. 'Beam me up, Scotty...'

Everest might envy. Then when he's on safe ground and the stuntman is out of view, the camera reveals Shatner's earnest-but-jowly face and obvious paunch. However, the height of embarrassment comes in the scene where the matronly Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) does a 'seductive' striptease. Would you let your granny do this on the big screen?

The fact that this misbegotten movie still managed to recover its full cost in the first month of its release is a testament to the boxoffice pulling power of the *Star Trek* franchise.

The latest movie in the series: *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* was described in advance by its director Nicholas Meyer (who also made *Wrath Of Khan*) as, "a small story about Spock in love." This little story was budgeted at a far from small \$26 million and shot on redressed sets from the popular *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In fact the Spock business was a red herring, because the film turns out to be a solid and largely unsentimental story about the impending breakup of the Klingon empire (after one of its energy sources goes *kerblooey* in a far-future version of the Chernobyl disaster).

Out of this turmoil emerges a Klingon Gorbachev named Gorkon, who sets out to forge an alliance with the Federation and bring peace to the galaxy. But



COMPETITION

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